



## *USS POTOMAC* MINI-HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

BY W. ABERNATHY

### ***USS Potomac* Passenger with Most On-Board Miles<sup>2</sup>**



Murray the Outlaw of Falahill

## FALA

April 17, 1940 – April 5, 1952

Fala was President Roosevelt's usual companion on his many cruises on the *USS Potomac* including in August 1941 when he joined FDR on the Presidential Yacht for his secret rendezvous with Winston Churchill for the Atlantic Charter conference in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. FDR had announced that he, Fala and other dignitaries were taking a fishing trip on the Presidential Yacht off the coast of New England when, in fact, they transferred to the *USS Augusta* in the pre-dawn hours on August 5, 1941, to meet Churchill arriving also in secret in Canada on the *HMS Prince of Wales*.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Fala Biography - FDR Library & Museum, Hyde Park; US Navy Ship Logs *USS Potomac* (AG25)

<sup>2</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt excepted

While FDR and Churchill were on the *HMS Prince of Wales* deck agreeing on the terms of the Atlantic Charter, Fala was below making friends with Rufus, Churchill's poodle, establishing his foreign relations credentials.

Fala was given to the President as arranged by his cousin, Margaret "Daisy" Stuckley, also a *Potomac* passenger, and went to live in the White House on Nov. 10, 1940. He was FDR's constant travel companion and was also with him at Hyde Park and Warm Springs. The dog had learned tricks to entertain the many famous visitors he met. His most impressive trick was curling his lips into a smile.

While on a *Potomac* fishing trip off the coast of Florida, Fala discovered a new stunt for himself. He noticed that as the fish were caught and thrown into a pile on the deck, they would all flip-flop back and forth and up in the air. To Fala, it looked like so much fun that he began to flip-flop like the fish; and he continued to do so for several days.

Records of the *USS Potomac* reveal about Fala that:

1. He got seasick.
2. He wet on the ship lines.
3. The crew was not happy about #2.

The President's dog became America's dog. He received thousands of fan letters annually at his White House address requiring a full-time secretary (human-type) to handle his correspondence. During the War, Fala even became an honorary Army private by donating a dollar to the war effort. Hundreds of thousands of American dogs joined him with their dollars. He also received many proposals of marriage.

Fala even had a secret service code name "The Informer" because he was the certain "give away" when the President's bodyguards were trying to conceal his location.

FDR was not unmindful of his pet's public appeal and usefulness in presenting political positions like in a radio address when the President said, "I hate war, Eleanor hates war, and our dog, Fala, hates war." Fala was a regular attendee at the President's press conference and cabinet meetings.

Fala was made most famous by FDR in his 1944 campaign speech to the International Teamster's Union. He addressed false Republican charges that at great expenses to the American taxpayers he had sent a U.S. Navy destroyer to retrieve Fala who had been left behind on an Aleutian Island.

Late in the speech about an event that never happened, he said:

"Those Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family don't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I'd left him behind on an Aleutian Island and had sent a destroyer back to find him – at a cost to the tax payers of two or three, or eight or twenty million dollars – his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself ... But I think I have a right to resent, to object, to libelous statements about my dog."

In April of 1945, President Roosevelt died in Warm Springs. Fala attended the funeral but seemed lost without his beloved master. He went to live with Mrs. Roosevelt at Val-Kill in Hyde Park, later joined by his grandson, Tamas McFala.

The Potomac Association Chairman, Michael Roosevelt, recalls as a young boy when his father, James Roosevelt, the President's oldest son and founding Chairman of the Potomac Association, received a telegram from his mother, Eleanor. Fala had died. The family was notified by wire. John Roosevelt, the president's youngest son, announced his death by the Associated Press in a story carried on page 1 in many American newspapers.

He was buried in the Rose Garden next to the sun dial not far from the graves of President and Mrs. Roosevelt.